

that moment when our hands connected apart

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/37098172) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/37098172>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	Dream SMP , Minecraft (Video Game)
Relationships:	No Romantic Relationship(s) , Grayson Purpled & Luke Punz , Alexis Quackity & Grayson Purpled
Characters:	Grayson Purpled (Video Blogging RPF) , Luke Punz , Alexis Quackity , Charlie Dalgleish , Floris Fundy , Noah Brown , Foolish Gamers , Eret (Video Blogging RPF) , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Dream SMP Ensemble , (Animal Army Ensemble)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Post-Apocalypse , Sweet Tooth AU , Angst with a Happy Ending , Hurt/Comfort , Grayson Purpled-centric (Video Blogging RPF) , Grayson Purpled and Luke Punz are Siblings , Younger Sibling Grayson Purpled (Video Blogging RPF) , Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD , Grief/Mourning , Implied/Referenced Child Abuse , Found Family
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of this crumbling world (Sweet Tooth AU)
Stats:	Published: 2022-02-13 Completed: 2022-02-20 Words: 19,040 Chapters: 2/2

that moment when our hands connected apart

by [hump7y_dump7y](#)

Summary

It was Wednesday, April 5th, 2011.

Punz' phone goes off. It starts making this beeping noise that Purpled has never heard before. He doesn't like the look on his brother's face when he pulls it out of his pocket and glances down at the screen. "This is the Emergency Broadcast System," a man states. He sounds like a robot. "This is not a test." Punz' eyes go wide at the words, fingers clenching a little tighter in Purpled's own.

Purpled knows that the words are bad. "What's going on?"

Punz looks down at him. "It's okay, Purp. It's going to be okay. We just need to get to the car." His voice is shaky and unsure. It scares Purpled, but he nods anyway. He lets Punz lead him down the street, where lots and lots of people are running in and out of buildings, all of them looking scared. There's screams, and cries, and the distant wail of something awful. Purpled wants to cry, but he doesn't. Punz is here. Punz is going to keep him safe.

That's when it happens.

OR

[A continuation of my Sweet Tooth AU where Purpled is just trying to survive in a world without his brother].

a boy who found himself at the end of the world

Chapter Notes

Hi!

Please go read the first part of this AU (this crumbling world) if you haven't or else this fic won't make a lot of sense.

Also, content warnings shouldn't be worse than in this crumbling world, but look at the tags and/or feel free to ask me if you want more details.

This was SO much fun to write. Enjoy!! :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was Wednesday, April 5th, 2011.

Purpled remembers that day. He never stops thinking about it – in the still, quiet moments when his eyes are open, in the loud, violent ones where they are closed. He remembers it clearly, almost *too* clearly, as if it happened to someone else instead of him.

He was wearing his favorite puffy coat and Ninja Turtle rain boots.

Punz, his brother, was telling him a story, gently holding his hand as they walked down the street together.

Purpled didn't think much about the people on TV except when they would interrupt his cartoons. He didn't ask why he wasn't allowed to know what they were talking about. He was happy. If Purpled knew then what he did now though, he never would have gone outside. He would have gone without desserts, or toys, or comic books forever. He would have done *anything*.

But Purpled didn't know. He left the house excited, ready to spend an entire day with his brother. He didn't like it when Punz was busy.

That's when it happened.

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The longer they run, the more people Purpled sees in the streets. Some of them get into their cars and drive opposite of the noise. Some of them go into buildings and don’t come out again.

Purpled stumbles, but Punz catches him and pulls him into his arms. Another group of people shove past them. He shoves his head into Punz’ chest. “It’s okay,” Punz repeats. “We’re almost there.” Purpled can barely hear him, but he nods. It’s loud. He’s scared. Everything is *loud*, but something even louder suddenly flies over them. He looks up right as a burst of wind hits his face. It’s a machine. A big machine that casts crawling shadows across the ground.

Purpled looks up at the helicopter right as a woman runs into them, not stopping, not even turning around in her panic. “Purpled!” Punz screams, sounding more scared than he ever has, but it’s too late. Purpled is already falling out of Punz’ arms.

“Punz!” he screams back, and he tries to hold on. He *tries* so hard.

That’s when it happens.

That’s the moment when their hands break apart.

“THIS IS OFFICIALLY YOUR FINAL WARNING.”

Purpled’s eyes slam shut as he hits the ground. It hurts. The voice that yells down at him is *loud*.

“THIS IS A MANDATORY QUARANTINE.”

He manages to open his eyes, and he can still see his brother’s hand. Punz is reaching for him, face full of pain and terror, and then he’s gone. He’s *gone*.

“I REPEAT, THIS IS A MANDATORY QUARANTINE.”

Purpled pushes himself up, ignoring the way his hands shake and his knees burn. He looks around, but all the faces he sees are strangers. “Punz!” he screams again, but no one answers. No one cares. He screams Punz’ name until his voice is hoarse. He cries harder than he’s ever cried before. There’s too many people. The entire street is filled with people running in different directions, and then the loud pops start one after another. They only make people scream more.

Purpled doesn’t know what the pops are, but he knows they’re *bad*. They hurt people. He knows he needs to avoid them, so he does the only thing he can do: he runs. He finds a corner between two buildings. It smells like disgusting, rotting food, but he buries himself under the

trash bags. He keeps crying, hand holding a pair of dog tags against his chest, but they don't comfort him anymore. He wants to go home. He wants Punz. He wants his *brother*.

Purpled listens to the violent whispers of death and destruction that come with the end of all life, and he lives.

Eventually, when the pops stop, he gets up and runs again. It isn't a miracle that he finds an empty, unlocked apartment that no one comes back to. It isn't fate that he somehow manages to turn the TV on, not to cartoons, but to people talking about things he doesn't understand, things that would end up saving his life. It isn't destiny. It isn't any of those things, because no matter how smart or strong you are, the only people that stay alive are the lucky ones. Purpled wishes he wasn't lucky.

“IT DOESN'T SHOW MERCY, AND IT IS HERE, AND IT IS NOW.”

“WE'RE ANTICIPATING NUMBERS NOT SEEN SINCE THE BLACK PLAGUE.”

“THE H5G9 VIRUS IS NOW THE DEADLIEST VIRUS IN OUR LIFETIME.”

“IT IS HERE, IT IS NOW.”

“IF YOU DON'T PRAY, NOW'S A GOOD TIME TO START.”

It was Wednesday, April 5th, 2011.

The last time he ever saw his brother.

Purpled was four years old.



Wolf mutedly watches the sun dip, its colors streaking across the sky in orange and gold, before he sees them: Owl. Crow. Duck. They've been gone about week, but they're back now, and they aren't alone. There's a pair of horses, but one of them isn't the Animal Army's and neither are the people walking with them. Wolf can barely see under the shadow of dusk, but he still catches glimpses of their approach.

After a certain point, he stands and turns to the only other person on guard duty tonight: Fundy. “C'mon,” he whispers, “we should go tell the others.” Fundy meets his eyes. There's a nervous edge in them that Wolf is familiar with, but he doesn't let it bother him. If these people were too dangerous, Owl wouldn't be bringing them back. They would already be dead.

Fundy carefully picks up his sword and sheathes it against his back. “Yeah, let's go,” he finally replies with a short nod. Wolf makes his way off the roof, pace neither too slow nor too fast as Fundy follows.

Wolf has had a lot of time to think over the years, and the Animal Army's system is an interesting one. There's no ranks like there were during Pre-crumble military. No anarchy like after the Great Crumble. No favor or bribes like the Last Men. Wilbur is the founder of the Animal Army, and he's the leader, but he isn't allowed to do whatever he wants. Well, Quackity would *definitely* argue about that, but he's always hated being told what to do.

Wolf watches him carefully as he walks into the room. Quackity's steps are purposeful. His face is blank, but it's also sour too. He's clearly upset about something. Is it the strangers they brought back, or something else? The rest of the members in the room look towards him with anticipation. Quackity stops in the middle of the room, glancing around at their faces before letting out a sigh. "Alright, listen up. I know not everyone is here yet, but I'm gonna get straight to the fucking point. We have the Blood God, his *horse* , and a hybrid kid that was with him too."

"*What—*" Wolf tries to say, but his voice gets buried underneath everyone else's. He sees the other member's faces fall to something more nervous, more subdued than before. What the hell is going *on*? This is the last thing he expected to hear. The Blood God. Wolf has met plenty of people, and Men, who admire him, but he's never, ever met the Man himself. He's always wondered how many of the stories are true and how many of them are lies. He used to believe them all.

"The Blood God? *Seriously?*" Foolish finally sputters out. He sounds like he doesn't quite believes Quackity, or more like he doesn't *want* to.

"This isn't a joke. It really is *the Blood God*. I told Wilbur we should just kill him. I told him, but he said no." No. That means that the Blood God is still alive, and he's their *prisoner* .

"He could be a good source of information," Wolf states, thinking out loud, and a few members agree with him.

"I don't know guys," Fundy says nervously, but he does seem to be considering it.

"He's *dangerous* ," Quackity argues, "but if there is a reason to keep him alive, that's the only one."

"Okay, this is great and all, but what about the kid?" Jack brings up again.

Puffy nods her head, clearly wanting to know the same thing. "Yeah, is he okay? How did you get him to trust you?"

Quackity shakes his head, running a hand nervously through his hair. "We didn't realize at first, but he can – he can *talk* . He *definitely* doesn't trust us, but he was with the Blood God. Anything is better than *that* ... and I don't know if Wilbur is going to introduce kid tonight, but he might."

"Do you know why he *was* with the Blood God? There's no way he's the one that taught him to talk!" Charlie concludes with his own kind of honesty, and he's right. The Blood God

would sooner show kindness as a means to kill a hybrid than to help one.

Quackity scoffs. “Fuck no. And no, not really. The only thing I know for sure is that the Blood God tricked the kid into going with him to Colorado. Which makes me think there might be a Last Man camp here we just haven’t found yet.” They’ve searched the territory thoroughly, for miles and *miles*, but nothing in this world is impossible.

“...Well, what kind of hybrid is he?” Niki speaks up, clearly trying to lighten the mood.

Quackity lets out a short, breathy laugh. “A raccoon. He’s got a giant tail.”

“...And what about the – the Blood God?” Fundy says, stuttering over the name like it’s a curse.

“Phil is guarding him for now,” is all Quackity answers this time. It’s a vague question for a vague answer, and there’s obviously something left unsaid. Wolf can feel it in his gut.

“So what should we do? Just stay here?” Foolish asks.

Quackity finally moves. He walks over to an empty chair and sits down with a sigh. When he looks back up, he meets Foolish’s eyes. “Yeah, at least for now,” he agrees, but his tone is still clipped. This is what Quackity *really* wants to say: *Yeah, at least until Wilbur tells me what to do*. “I saw Eret out front,” Quackity mentions, “but where are Tubbo and Ranboo?”

“I found them earlier, let them know that Wilbur was back with two strangers and a horse,” Jack explains, “but they said they still had ‘laundry to do.’”

“Of course,” Quackity replies lightheartedly. ‘Laundry’ is an obvious excuse. It just means Tubbo and Ranboo want to watch the sunset together.

“You’re right. Tubbo has always wanted to meet another hybrid. I hope we can all meet him soon!” Niki says, excitement lifting her voice. Wolf nods. Tubbo is totally going to regret watching the sunset tonight.

There’s still a part of Wolf that doubts though – the part that’s kept him alive, even after his entire world crumbled, shattered like the memory of his brother's face.

He thinks about the hybrid kid next. No one has said his name. Does he even have one, or do they just not know it? Maybe Quackity just doesn’t want to scare him. Wolf thinks about the fact that the hybrid can talk, and that he’s survived this long. Who raised him? How does he know the Blood God? Why the hell were they –

” – Hey, Wolf!” Foolish yells, and it ends his questions. “Join us for some good ‘ol Pac-Man?” Wolf hadn’t even realized he’d been zoning out. Quackity told them what he wanted, and now the rest of the members have already spread out across the room. Niki and Puffy are sitting at one of the tables talking. Jack, currently wearing the VR headset, is slowly being surrounded by the remaining members who want to watch.

Wolf lets a grin slip onto his face, and he snorts as he turns back to Foolish. Quackity, Fundy, and Charlie are standing next to him, waiting for him to answer. “Duh,” he replies. Some

things really don't change, do they? He lets himself get lost in the normalcy of it all:

Fundy's occasional hiss of frustration.

Foolish's voice that turns with fake panic.

Charlie's complete silence until he's won.

Quackity's eye rolls.

Wolf manages to forget about everything, at least for a little while.

Eret gets back first. "Hey guys," he says as he closes the door behind him.

"Eret, how are you?" Quackity asks.

Eret's eyes are covered by his shades, but his mouth turns up with a slight smile. "I'm doing well, thank you," he answers, and he wanders over for a few rounds of Pac Man.

Phil gets back next. His entrance is quiet, and it's clear he doesn't want to ruin the good mood. "Phil!" some of the members greet.

"We're gaming, Phil!" Charlie suddenly yells. Wolf lets out a short burst of laughter, but he continues focusing. It's still his turn.

Phil cackles. "Of course you are! Have fun, mate," he says.

Wolf glances over fast enough to see Quackity's smile fall. "Just a second," he tells them, and he goes to speak with Phil. Neither of their voices can be heard over the sounds in the room. Wolf can guess what they're talking about though. There's not a lot of topics.

Eventually, Wolf gets bored and so does everyone else. They move over to where the rest of the members are now grouped up. "You need to pick up the other power-up!" Puffy yells. Eret is wearing the VR headset now, and his shades are folded and placed on the desk in front of him.

"No, look at the bar at the top!" Jack disagrees.

"The game Animalz was created in 2004 by the company—"

"—I really appreciate that, Charlie, but I don't think it's going to help me win," Eret interrupts.

Oh my god. What is *wrong* with them? Wolf is about to take the headset and do it himself, but Wilbur gets back. The hybrid is with him, clothes ratty and torn at the edges like they were ripped by more than just the outdoors. There's bandages all over his body too – a sign that he's been repeatedly injured. Wolf isn't surprised. He's seen only a few hybrids over the years, and it's always the same. It just is. It still makes him feel sick.

The hybrid tells them his name. "Tommy," he says, and his voice is weak and strong and bold and afraid, all at the same time.

Wolf waits for his turn, and when he introduces himself, he gets close enough to see them now. Tommy's eyes are wide, but his fear is covered up by something else. Wolf knows what it is: it's something *stronger* than fear, because he's seen Tommy's eyes staring back at him before.

His own eyes.



Purpled shivers. The room is cold, and white-colored, and there's nothing in it other than a chair they brought in for him to sit on. He doesn't like it. It's *different*, and there's nothing to look at. There's only a man. His clothes are yellow, and he's wearing something over his face with a little window for him to see out of. The man sits down on the other side of the glass and presses a button.

"What's your name, kid?" he asks, but his voice sounds strange. It's scary. It makes Purpled press his hands to his ears, but where he would have once cried, now he just stays silent. He wants Punz. *He wants Punz*. He can't even remember the last time he wasn't scared.

Purpled stares out through the glass, but he doesn't look at the man. The man keeps staring at him. Why is staring? Why is he asking his name? Why didn't the other men hurt him earlier? They screamed at each other, and it made his head hurt really bad, but for some reason, they didn't scream at *him*.

"...So, as far we know you've been in that house for... a month now? Maybe two?" There's a pause, and then the man sighs as he drags a hand down his face. They gave him food earlier, a granola bar, and he ate it so fast his stomach hurt. He doesn't know why the water didn't.

"Do you have any family? Any friends?" Purpled doesn't say anything. "...C'mon, kid. We're on your side. We just want to help you." They put a blanket over his shoulders, and talked to him with soft, nice voices. He didn't understand what they meant when they said he was "clean" and "safe," but it must be good. The people on the TV liked those words too.

Purpled glances up, and through the little window, he can see the man's eyes. He doesn't *look* mean. All he does is stare at him. He's waiting. Purpled curls a hands into his shirt. He needs to find his brother. If answering the man's questions is the only way, then he has to do it. "...My brother," he says, and it's barely even a whisper. It's so soft he doesn't even think the man is going to hear him.

"Your brother?" the man repeats, and he sounds happier all of a sudden. "What's his name? We can try to find him."

"...Punz." The man nods at him, and he turns to look behind him, back towards someone Purpled can't see. He can't hear what the man says, but then he presses the button again and Purpled can. "It's good that you told me that. It's going to be okay," the man tries to reassure,

but Purpled doesn't want to hear that, not from him. "Do you remember where you last saw him?" Purpled does. It hurts his head to think about. He doesn't want to, but it's so easy to remember. The people on TV said it over and over again, until they didn't say anything anymore.

"Quawen," he mumbles.

The man looks at him for a moment, and then, with a little more hesitance, "You mean quarantine? Here in the city?"

Purpled nods.

"Do you know where he went when you got separated? Did you hear any loud noises?" How does the man know that's what happened? Was he there too?

"Mhm," Purpled admits, and suddenly the man looks behind him again and shakes his head. "But he's okay," Purpled adds, and for the first time since they brought him in here, his voice raises.

"I believe you," the man says, "but while we look for him we're going to find you a different place to live, where an adult can take care of you. Is that okay?"

"No! I need to stay here! My brother is going to find me. He's going to find me if I just— just *stay* here." Purpled doesn't know if he trusts the man, but he trusts Punz. Punz would never, ever leave him.

The man looks down at him. "I believe you," he says again, and there's something in his eyes. Purpled doesn't think he believes him, even though he says he does. It's only later that he learns what the thing in his eyes was: pity.

They never find his brother. Instead, the man does what he says. He sends Purpled somewhere far away.

Purpled wakes to the sound of fire. It's a roaring crackle of death, a hazy smoke that fills his lungs with terror. He doesn't even think before he's throwing his blankets off, stumbling to his feet with the realization that *they didn't wait, they didn't wait, they're going to save themselves*.

He grabs his bag with one hand and presses his other tight against his face, half-blind as he searches for some kind of escape. The fumes are already spreading inside, furling to the ceiling, covering the room until he can barely see anything. There's something that rises over the roaring sound – a faint pop that enters his ears, one after another.

If he goes out the door, he's dead, which means his only option is the window.

He's the only one in his room.

Purpled shoves the door open. His eyes have started burning from the smoke, and he coughs a few times before he can hold his breath again. The hallway is burning, pieces of the wall collapsing into the floor. He doesn't stop moving, pushing forward through the flames until he reaches the window at the end of the hallway. His hands shake as he fumbles to unlatch the lock like he's seen the older boys do only a couple times before. It feels like he's already died by the time it opens. He gasps hard. The air that travels across his skin and down his throat burns cold.

Purpled throws his leg over the sill, falling out onto the roof. He wants to keep lying there, gasping in breaths of air, but he can't. The pops continue. Purpled tried to ask what the pops were one time, but he was told he wouldn't need to know until he was older. He does have a name for what the pops mean though, a name the adults gave it: the Great Crumble. He wonders if that's what's happening. It's just like day. The Great Crumble is happening again, while he's lying here, staring up into the black sky, watching the smoke rise until it disappears.

He doesn't know how, but he starts moving across the roof, crawling until he fits into a space big enough to hide. Purpled squeezes his eyes shut and tries to clear his head. If he stays, he'll burn, but if he runs, the pops will get him. He has to think. He has to survive. He has to *find Punz*. But what is he supposed to do? He should have known. He was going to die the moment they saw another boy's shaking fingers. It wasn't supposed to be like *this* though. They were supposed to wait. The adults said they were going *save* everyone who hadn't caught the Sick.

Purpled opens his eyes. He crawls along the roof, looking over one side to see if he can find a way down. There's a pile, black and burning on the grass— *h e doesn't look, he doesn't look* .

There's a group of people standing near it, at the front of the house. Purpled doesn't recognize their faces. Some of them are wearing normal clothes: hats and coats and boots, but some of them aren't. Their clothes look like the ones important people used to wear, and they're holding the things that make the pops. They aren't from the house, where they sent him and a bunch of other boys after they were "misplaced," but they aren't important people either. Everything from before the Great Crumble disappeared a few months ago, including the important people.

Purpled doesn't realize what they were at the time, but it was a militia – a group of cowards too scared to let a bunch of children live. He does know that the only people left are the ones that can protect themselves. The adults protected him, when they gave him a room, and cooked him food, and calmed him down when he'd wake up screaming at night.

Punz would protect him too, but he's not here. Punz isn't here and neither are the adults, and Purpled knows he has to do it himself.

The bad people must be waiting for the fire to stop, and then they're going to check if anyone is still left alive. They *have* to, which means the only way he's going to live is to get down from the roof and run as far away as he can.

And so, that's what Purpled does.

He crawls over the roof.

He runs.

He survives.

At eight years old, he is truly alone, left with nothing but the hope that he'll see his brother again.



"It would only be for like an hour or two at the most," Quackity explains, "and I wouldn't be asking you to do this unless it was *absolutely* necessary."

Wolf lets out a short breath. Foolish is *supposed* to be doing this, because Quackity chose him. He's strong and smart. Probably the least scared out of all of them, besides Wolf himself, of course. And yet Quackity is standing in front of him right now, because instead of asking another member on the night shift, or (and there's no way in hell he'd ever do *this*) Wilbur, Quackity is asking him.

"Why is it absolutely necessary?" Wolf questions neutrally.

Quackity clicks his tongue. "Does it really matter? I know you, Wolf. You're *more* than capable."

Wolf thinks it over for a second. "...I guess you're right," he ends up agreeing. "I'm not afraid of any Last Man, not even the Blood God." He could press for a real answer, but he finds that he doesn't care. Not really. Quackity smiles. He has his reasons, and besides, it feels good to be appreciated. It feels good not to be looked down on like he's still just a scared kid.

Wolf shouldn't go into the Blood God's room. He definitely wasn't *told* to, but he can't help but be curious. Quackity isn't going to let him do this again, not without having to *actually* explain his reason. That means this is one of the only chances he's going to get to see the Blood God in person. Wilbur is going to decide when he dies, and for all they know, it could be in an hour.

Wolf slips the key out of his pocket. He hasn't really figured out Tommy yet either. He's a survivor, and a kid, and a hybrid too, which are all the things Tubbo is, but they're not the same. The bandages on Tommy's legs reveal something that can be described as nothing but torture. As much as he hates why, it makes sense. Tommy is startlingly loud sometimes, and other times he looks like he's ready for someone to hurt him.

Wolf pushes the key into the lock and turns it. He feels sick again. Why? Why would the Blood God be traveling with a beat up, recently tortured hybrid if he didn't do it himself? How was Tommy “tricked” into traveling with him, like Quackity said? The story is incomplete, and Wolf wants to know the rest.

He pushes the door open and steps inside, hand falling to his sword when he sees the Blood God. He's sitting at a table, hands cuffed, eyes trained on a book. Did someone give it to him, or was it already here? Wolf shuts the door and presses his back against it. The Blood God does not move. He doesn't even look up. Wolf isn't stupid enough to think he isn't being watched though.

The tales sing of bright, blood red hair and a mask of pure white bone. A Man who is more than a man. He who can take down entire armies. Humanity's hope against the hybrids. The General's greatest ally. It's different here in this room. There's no crown. The Blood God is wearing civilian clothes. His hair isn't red, roots fading into black now. This isn't a god. He's confined. A prisoner, just as defenseless as anyone else. Is it true then? Were the Last Men really so delusional? Was Wolf really so desperate that he believed them?

The Blood God meets his eyes. Wolf's fingers tremble against the hilt of his sword. *Fuck*. It's not because he's scared. He's just— just *surprised* , that's all. He doesn't believe the stories, because stories don't keep you alive, but staring into the Blood God's dark, blank eyes, he believes this: there's a reason he was given that name.

"What were you expectin' exactly?" Wolf stills. The Blood God's voice is low and expressionless, but it breaks the silence and twists it into something entirely different.

"Hatred." Wolf has seen true hatred. He's felt his own as it burns through his skin. When he remembers his own weakness, that helpless feeling will return. He'll think about his brother for days without stopping, and then he won't think about him at all.

"No, not right now." It isn't a lie. Wolf can't keep his face blank enough. His eyes widen, and the Blood God continues to speak. "The only thing I hate is the fact that you don't have anythin' interestin' to read. Bring me somethin' that isn't meant for children." The book the Blood God was reading is face down on the table now.

"Do you like reading?" Wolf asks. Quackity would yell at him if he knew he was in here asking this, but Quackity's not exactly here at the moment, is he?

"I do. When I'm not stuck in a cell. You?"

Wolf laughs. It's a soft, unhappy thing. "I never learned how." He can't read at a much higher level than a toddler, because the last time he read something he *was* a toddler.

"I see," the Blood God says, and there's a moment of silence before, "That was insensitive of me."

"Maybe a bit."

“I’m workin’ on it,” the Blood God quips back, and although the tone is flat, it’s friendly. Wolf doesn’t understand. He should be hated, but he’s not. He should have been attacked, but here they are, chatting as if there’s no history between them— no, that’s not quite right. There is history, but it’s as if they’ve put it aside while they’re in this room. “...How old are you?” the Blood God asks.

Wolf almost breaks into a laugh. Why is that always, *always* the question asked? “Twenty. That would make you thirty-something, right?”

“Thirty three.”

Wolf nods. How? How has it already been sixteen years? “Can I ask you something?”

The Blood God’s gaze flickers to the ceiling. He looks bored. “Isn’t that why you’re here?”

“I wasn’t even supposed to guard you at all. I doubt you’ll ever see me again, after tonight.”

A huff of laughter. “Well, I’m not going to escape,” the Blood God says even though he wasn’t asked.

“Why not?” Wolf doesn’t mean for it to come out like a challenge, but it does. He immediately regrets it. What the *fuck*? This is *crazy*. This isn’t how he imagined this conversation going at all.

“Is that your question?”

Wolf relaxes a little at the lack of anger. “Sure, I guess.”

“I don’t have a reason to.”

“We’re most likely going to kill you. Do you *want* to die?”

“No, thank you. And yes, I’m aware.” Wolf falls silent. He doesn’t know what to say to that, but the story makes even less sense than before. What kind of reason does the Blood God need? Wolf thinks living to live is good enough. It doesn’t matter who you leave behind. You don’t need anybody, you just need to stay alive. “...So, about those books I mentioned?” the Blood God brings up again when the silence stretches thin.

Wolf lets him change the subject. “What kinds of books?”

“Anythin’. Preferably about mythology.”

Wolf pulls his hand off his sword, and this time he really does laugh. “I’ll see what I can do,” he offers. What’s wrong with giving a book to the Blood God? It doesn’t mean Wolf *likes* him. It doesn’t mean he agrees with the things he’s done. Never. It doesn’t mean he’s showing him some kind of mercy, either. Wolf just thinks he understands a little better now. The Blood God is willing to die for something, and whether that something is Tommy, or the Last Men; for blood or peace, Wolf has yet to figure it out.

Wolf's conversation with the Blood God continues, until footsteps echo down the hallway. They're Quackity's. He can tell by the pattern. Quackity opens the door, takes one look at him standing five feet away from the Blood God, and pulls him out of the room. After Wolf gives him the key and the door is securely locked shut, Quackity turns on him with a seething look. "What the *fuck* are you doing? I never told you to go into the cell!"

"But you never said I *couldn't*," Wolf smirks, "and I bet you don't care when Foolish does. Besides, I thought you said I was 'more than capable.'"

"I know, and you are— it's just..." Quackity stutters into a pause, and he seems to fight himself for a moment before he groans. "Okay, okay, you know what, *whatever*. So what did you think? Does the Blood God live up to his name?"

Wolf thinks back on his conversation. "He does, and he doesn't," he decides, shrugging his shoulders. Names can be complicated.



Purpled's arm is still screwed up when he meets the man. He nearly broke it a few days ago running from the sound of guns, hitting it just right for something to twist inside. It hasn't felt like his arm since.

The man's eyes are watching him closely. He's wearing a plaid shirt, worn jeans, and dirty-looking boots. There's a pile of wood behind him laid out on some kind of flat surface with curved-up sides. He has one of his hands on a rope and the other down by his side.

Purpled picks up on muffled voices in the distance. This isn't a city. It's a place for groups, like the few he's traveled with, or stealers and killers to travel through. He wonders, quickly, if his brother's voice could ever be one of them, but he knows better. There's no place for kind people out here, and the last thing he needs to do is look *weak*.

"Purpled," he says, knowing what he looks like right now, with his ripped, dirty clothes, messy hair, and eyes, wary of being close to another person. He has no weapon except a dull knife, and his bag has nothing that won't be gone tomorrow. Most people out here are the same as him, at least, when they do let you look at them. The real problem is that most of them are adults, and he's not. He either gets lucky, and someone feels bad enough to protect him, at least for a little while, at least until something happens to them, or...

The man's face raises in surprise. "...The name's Hbomb," he says, interrupted by voices again, closing in from the distance. They sound like men. Purpled's breath stutters, but he tries to stay calm. Hbomb frowns, looking towards the voices and then back at Purpled again. "How old are you?"

"Thirteen," Purpled lies. He can't push the number any higher than that, because even *he* wouldn't believe his own lie.

"I'm guessing you don't have any family."

"I– I do," Purpled says.

He doesn't think Hbomb believes him, but the man doesn't say anything. "I doubt I do," he admits. "I'm actually trying to find my friend right now... Say, kid, is there a reason you're talking to me? I don't have anything valuable. No food or water." Well that's a lie. Hbomb has a backpack that has to have *something* in it.

Purpled nearly rolls his eyes. Nearly. "You have a weapon."

"So do you," Hbomb shots back. Is he *stupid*?

"You have a *gun*. They probably have guns. I obviously don't." Purpled can't make the reason any clearer than that.

Hbomb chuckles, but he must get it now. "Jeez," he responds, drawing out the word with surprise and a bit of praise too, "you're smart for your age. How'd you know?" Not a second longer passes, before Hbomb reaches for his back pocket and pulls out a gun.

Purpled shrugs as his eyes fall onto the gun. It's a small one that can't shoot more than one bullet at once. He didn't know. At least, not for sure. He still hasn't figured out Hbomb, but Purpled hopes he won't have to before the night is over. "...Just a little luck," he explains.

The voices draw even closer now.

Hbomb tucks the gun back into his pocket, adjusting the rope over his shoulder while he does so. "I guess that's all any of us really have anymore," he agrees, looking Purpled over with an expression that's difficult to read. His eyes linger on the chain around his neck, and Purpled fights down the urge to hold it. "...Keep your distance, alright?"

Purpled nods, hiding his relief as much as he can. It's just another weakness. He doesn't thank Hbomb when he very well may have just saved his life. He doesn't talk to Hbomb, even though he can see the way his once careful guard starts to fall. It's easy to look weak and defenseless when he needs to, because a part of Purpled always has been.

Hbomb hides them in one of the buildings. He tells him about his friend Lazar who lived in Utah before the Great Crumble, how he's travelling there now in hopes that Lazar is still alive. Purpled doesn't care. He *doesn't*. He doesn't feel bad when Hbomb offers to look at his arm when it starts to hurt. He doesn't feel bad when Hbomb offers him a little bit of his food.

When you have no friends and no family, people will only give you so much, and how much they give you is never enough. Purpled has no food, or water, or even a good weapon to defend himself. He's eleven years old and living in a world he wasn't meant to survive the first *week* in.

Later that night, he steals from Hbomb. He steals enough that his stomach stops cramping and his hands stop shaking, but he can't bring himself to take everything. This time it's *different*. He's never stolen from a person he's talked to before. He's never had them care. It

feels personal. It feels like he's the worst, most despicable person on the planet. He wonders what Punz would think of him now.

It's the last time Purpled ever cries after stealing. There's a feeling that burns hot in his chest, like fire. It keeps him up at night, and steals away the kindness that his brother always taught him to hold onto. Purpled hates it, but he hates the regret that he couldn't just take it all even more. He knows he's going to find more people out here, *good* people, people that he'll die with if he isn't careful. Purpled knows he's going to do it again.

He's ten when he sees a hybrid for the first time, off in the cold, dead night, the sound of something too wild to be human coming from it. His heart hammers in his chest, and he's too scared to close his eyes for fear that it will kill him in his sleep. Purpled stares into the dark, and he feels the first hint of anger build in him towards something other than himself.

He's eleven when he hears about a group of men. Hybrid-hunters. Purpled knows what the Great Crumble did to him, and what the Sick does, and what, people say, the hybrids *still could* if they don't follow Dream's Code. Purpled closes his eyes and sees a monster with bloody claws and asks himself: *Will I be able to see Punz again, if the hybrids go away?*

He's twelve when he joins one of the newly formed cities, voices whispering of the Last Men, and a man who will do everything he can to protect them. Purpled wonders which is worse: living off old, abandoned buildings and the pity of strangers, or living off rules, and peace, and the General's idea of a world where humanity *survives*.

He's thirteen when he hears tales of the Blood God. A God-king. A symbol of hope.

He's fourteen when he doesn't just *see* the few Last Men that walk around the city, but actually meets them.

"How's it going, Purpled?" Karl asks, tone light. He's wearing a dark overcoat with boots, and gloves, and a beanie. There's also an assault rifle in his hands. Yeah. That's a thing. It's just for show though. Everyone here follows the rules, and besides, Karl is too friendly to actually shoot a human. Purpled still can't tell if he's being genuine, but it's better than other things, like being yelled at, or kicked, or hit.

Callahan didn't see him walk up. He's busy watching the city gate, but when Karl taps his shoulder, he looks over and smiles. Callahan's clothes are similar to Karl's, except he has a weird hat with a puff on the top.

Purpled has only known the two Men for a couple months, but he's learned quite a bit about them.

"Fine, I guess," he finally replies even though it's not. "What's the job?"

Karl's face falls and he turns his attention to Callahan, hands moving in the air. The thing about Callahan is that he's deaf, which means he was born without the ability to hear. Purpled didn't know that was even possible until they met, but there's a lot of things he doesn't know. Callahan uses sign language, an entire language based on hand movements and body language. It's kind of cool.

Callahan doesn't sign back at first. He glances over Purpled with some emotion he can't place. He's never looked at Purpled like that before. When he finally does sign back though, whatever it is makes Karl shake his head. What does *that* mean? Do they not have a job? This can't be happening. This— this is the only thing that's really *worked* for him. They meet. They give him jobs: stuff like stealing (contraband) items, or smuggling people into the city, or labor that nobody wants to do because it's dangerous. Purpled does. He does it, and he survives another day.

Karl stops signing, looking over to meet his eyes. *Maybe you're no longer useful. Maybe they're just trying to find a way to tell you —*

"—We do," Karl admits.

Purpled scowls. "Then what the fuck is the *problem*?"

Karl's laugh is a little more strained this time. "I'm gonna be frank with you, Purpled. We don't have a job this week. Some nimrods are just too uncomfortable with kids helping them, but we know you're smart. You're useful, and the Last Men still want your help."

Purpled has heard that one a million times before. What is he supposed to do, starve just because he's a *kid*? People are idiots. "You still have something for me though. What is it?"

"Something a little different than usual." Different. That could mean a few things, but he has a feeling he knows.

"It's outside?" Going outside means more danger than staying in the city. It also means Purpled gets better food, and clean water, and new clothes. There may be cities, but that's not always enough. People don't always follow the rules, and the Last Men can't always stop them.

Karl's expression brightens. "That's part of it," he says as he signs something else to Callahan. Purpled still can't tell what they're thinking. He can, however, find the unhappiness that wasn't there before. "Right," Karl continues, "so we need you to help with some business in the next city over."

"What kind of business?" Purpled already told them that he refuses to do really bad things, not that they *want* him to. It still felt important to say.

"Last Man business. Just a letter. I promise it's not anything that will put you or anyone else in danger."

"I thought you told me I wasn't a Last Man."

"Unofficially," and Karl looks a bit sheepish now, "unofficially, you *are*, at least until you're old enough to actually join. But, anyway, the city is in Wyoming. It's about two days from here, and there's a Man there named Antfrost you need to give the letter to."

Purpled takes a moment to think the job over, even though he already knows the answer and they do too.

Callahan is watching him closely, and when their eyes meet, he gives Purpled a thumbs up. It's the easiest way to tell him what choice he should make. Karl's face is more neutral, but he's moving a lot more too, fidgeting. Purpled figures it's because he's nervous. The Last Men want him to take this job. What he can't figure out is *why*.

He's fifteen, starving, tired, and unable and unwilling to die. Why did they ever decide to help him? Why not someone else?

Purpled accepts.



Wolf wakes up to the sound of footsteps. A lot of footsteps. He can barely open his eyes before there's a hand rapping against his door, knocks echoing with a loud, urgent rhythm. Wolf tries to push past the fog of sleep that falls over his mind and the blankets wrapped around him. Something has *happened*. He blinks against the light that still escapes through his curtains.

He crosses his room with a few deliberate steps and opens the door. There's a knife in his hand, pressing just against the back of his leg. It doesn't fall, but it does loosen. Wilbur is on the other side. His eyes are blurry, words thrown with the kind of panic Wolf hasn't heard from him he thinks *ever*. "Tommy is missing," he gasps out, and the wary and worried Animal Army stand behind him.

Wolf hasn't seen Tommy since before he went on guard duty. He climbed up onto the roof last night and no one was there, so he waited. It's not a *rule*, but there's very few times they don't follow it: 'Two guards for dinner, three guards for day (or night).' Just as Wolf was a breath away from leaving his post, he heard the ladder rattle. "Sorry for taking so long," Fundy had stuttered out. "Quackity switched the schedule on me. I guess he needed to talk with some of the other members."

Wolf lets out an annoyed noise. *I know you, Wolf. You're more than capable.* "He better stop slacking off," Wolf complains, and that's how it went. He should have asked more questions, or gone to find Quackity, or done literally *anything* else, but he didn't. He and Fundy sat under the pale moon all night, voices low as they told stories until the sun came up.

It feels like a mistake. No, it *is* a mistake.

Wolf says what he does know: "If he's survived this long, he'll live." He ignores the tightness in his throat; how his heart refuses to slow down even when he can't find something to make it beat. Tommy is a survivor. Whatever the hell happened to him before, he survived, and he'll do it again. This isn't optimism, or hope, or anything like that. It's just the truth.

Wilbur nods. He seems to gather himself for what they're about to do, and the only thing that gives him away now are his eyes. There's a desperate, hollow guilt in them, and it's the same look in everyone's. Wolf can still see it there, even after the rest of the members give up and begin to walk away.

None of it reaches him. Wolf just follows a few paces behind the rest of the night crew: Foolish, Fundy, Charlie, and Eret. Everyone is silent, especially Wolf, and the only sound between them is their shoes hitting the ground.

"—can't just go pretend like nothing is wrong! I have to go with you!" It's Tubbo's voice that breaks the silence. There's no way he's going to listen to Wilbur's order if he didn't listen the first time. Tubbo is stubborn. He isn't afraid to knock heads. Sometimes literally. If anyone deserves to find out what happened to Tommy, it's him. Wolf knows the others are thinking the same thing.

Eventually, the arguing fades as they walk further and further away, until it falls completely silent again. "...I can't believe we're supposed to just go back to sleep," Fundy says. "I mean, I get why, but *fuck* man, we should be *doing* something." Wolf doesn't respond. He doesn't feel guilty. He doesn't feel *like* anything.

"Think about it this way: we can't help if we're too tired to even think," Charlie points out.

"I agree," Eret says, "but I should have *done* something last night when I saw Tommy, instead of— of just letting him walk away... I guess," and he pushes his shades up, "there's no

point in thinking about it now. It's too late."

Foolish nods. "Exactly. All that matters is what we do *now*, and it's not like we even know *what* that is. We just need to wait for Quackity's orders."

"I know, I know," Fundy sighs. "I just really hope Tommy is okay. I bet it was the Last Men that snuck in. How the fuck did we even let that *happen*?"

"I bet Quackity was right. It had to have been the *Blood God*," Foolish states, voice low in resentment as he completely ignores the question, "who led the Last Men here. That must have been his plan all along."

"I don't know... What do you think, Wolf?" Charlie asks, and there's a helpless curiosity in his question.

Wolf stares at everyone for moment, before he ducks his head forward. "I think..." he begins, and there's a million things he could say right now, about the Last Men, or the Blood God, or Tommy, but his chest starts to hurt, "...that we'll know when we wake up."

Fundy suddenly slows to a stop and then everyone else, although a little confused, does too. They're almost to the apartments now. "Seriously? You're just *fine* with this?" Wolf can hear the anger before he sees it. He stays calm when he turns to Fundy. He *has* to stay calm. This is just because they were both on guard duty last night. Fundy feels guilty. They all do. They're just taking it out on each other.

"C'mon guys—" Charlie starts to say.

"—What good— what fucking good does it *ever* do? Guessing?" Wolf interrupts. "What's the point?"

The words explode out of Fundy's mouth, but Wolf doesn't think he'd even be able to feel them. He doesn't think he'd even care. "The fucking *point*?!"

"Wolf—"

"—Stop." Foolish cuts everyone off, including Eret, who was just about to say something. His voice isn't higher. It isn't stronger. He doesn't even sound *angry*, and yet it reaches Fundy like water to a lit match. His words are doused into silence until all that's left is a glare, but maybe he'll still get angry. Wolf would *love* to know what he has to say. He notices, suddenly, how tensed up he's gotten, fists reared back just slightly enough to throw a punch.

Foolish takes a step forward and places a hand on Fundy's shoulder. He looks at everyone, and then Wolf, and then Fundy, and then he finally shakes his head. "Whatever," Fundy sighs again, and he looks away.

Wolf realizes that's it. That's fucking *it*. "Wolf," he hears Charlie call out softly, and his face is probably still sad-looking. Wolf doesn't take the time to look. He *can't* look at any of them, because he knows what will happen.

“Wolf,” Eret also calls out, but it doesn’t stop him. His mind is already a million miles away, even if his body isn’t.

"No, let him go," he hears Foolish say, and the others must listen. They don’t call out to him after that. He can feel the eyes that bore into his back, but Wolf doesn't turn around, even when he catches the last part of their whispers about him.

When he gets back to his room, Wolf closes the door and locks himself inside. It's still cold, but it’s dark and comforting in a way that it wasn’t outside. He falls down onto his bed, wrapping his blankets back around him. It’s only then that it hits him. It reminds him of bullets, and inescapable smoke, and acrid, overwhelming loss. He lost *everything*, and now he’s afraid he’s going to lose it all again. This suffocating, familiar feeling... *this* is what it means to care about someone.

Wolf tried his absolute best to destroy this feeling the first time his brother died, but he failed. He failed miserably. He thinks of his brother, and then he thinks of Tommy. He fails this time too.

He wakes up to another knock, but this one is different. It’s softer and quieter. He pulls off his blankets and walks up to the door again. His chest aches. His eyes hurt too, but not from the light this time. It’s darker out than before, which means he must have slept for a decent amount of time. At least the five or six hours that he normally does. When he opens his door, it’s Charlie standing on the other side this time. There’s no immediate panic on his face. He just looks normal, if not a little tired. “Hi,” he greets softly.

“What happened?” Wolf’s voice comes out groggy and a little cracked at the end, even though he doesn’t want it to.

"Wilbur told me to wake you up," Charlie explains. “I went to find him, and I saw the Blood God. I think he really is helping us!”

"Wait, why?" Dull shock travels through Wolf's head.

Charlie’s smile falls a bit, and he takes on a more pensive look. "I'm not entirely sure yet. Wilbur just said to wake you guys up for dinner so he can explain.”

Wolf is quiet for a moment. That makes sense.

They walk a few rooms down, to Fundy’s.

Wolf expects anger. He’s smart enough to know that what he said yesterday wasn’t true. It was just a lie. It was just a way to protect himself from a pain that always comes, no matter what he does. He expects anger, but this time he doesn’t *want* it.

Fundy’s door opens. He’s dressed in his normal clothes – his fur coat, jeans, and white sneakers. He stares at them, but there’s nothing angry in his eyes. He just looks tired. Wolf remembers weary, cold words, and raised fists, and the crash of it all when it falls down on

him. How many times has he done this? Why do they always forgive him? *Why* does he even do it at all? “What is it?” Fundy asks, and he grabs his sword before they leave.

They tell him.

Eret answers. Quackity and Foolish don’t.

They walk into the arcade hall.

The Animal Army are grouped up together at one side of the room. Wolf can immediately tell why: The Blood God is at the other. He’s dressed in his crown and cape, but even though his hand is placed on the hilt of his sword, he doesn’t look ready to fight. He tracks a calm, steady gaze across the room, never lingering on any one person for long.

Wilbur stands beside the Blood God, but he maintains a respectable distance. He doesn’t look scared at the potential bloodshed. He just looks nervous. Quackity and Foolish are near the back of the room, standing away from both the Animal Army *and* the Blood God. Wolf’s eyes narrow, but before he can figure out why that is, Charlie says something. “I brought them Wilbur, just like you said to!”

They suddenly hold the attention of the entire room.

Wolf glances over the worried, relieved, and angry faces of the Animal Army, turning away only to meet the Blood God’s eyes. He doesn’t look into them for long. He looks at Quackity and Foolish next, the two of them staring behind the silence of whatever it is they want to say. Wilbur is last. His expression changes when he sees them. It turns from that poorly concealed nervousness to something like relief. “Good. Thank you, Charlie,” Wilbur says, and then he lets out a sharp exhale. “Now that you’re all here, I can finally explain why Tech— why the Blood God is no longer locked up.”

I know you, Wolf. You're more than capable.

We have the Blood God, his horse, and a hybrid kid that was with him too.

I see. That was insensitive of me.

The only thing I know for sure is that the Blood God tricked the kid into going with him to Colorado.

Well, I'm not going to escape.

Quackity switched the schedule on me. I guess he needed to talk with some of the other members.

The Animal Army. The Blood God. The General. *Tommy*. All the things that Wolf failed to put together flood through his head, and he completes the story. Why couldn’t he just *see* it before? Those looks – the ones cast across the room, they weren’t just directed at the Blood God. Quackity, their leader, friend, and ally, he— he *betrayed* them.

Wolf doesn't know what to say. He doesn't think he has anything to say.

“What the– what the *fuck!*” Fundy yells, but his words wobble, breaking off near the end. He gives up before he can ever raise his fists.

“I see. So that’s why,” Eret states with a choked out laugh. His eyes are hidden behind his shades, but he turns his head away.

Foolish stays silent. He must not know what to say, or he must not *want* to say anything. Maybe he still thinks what he did was right. Maybe he regrets everything.

“Quackity...” Charlie says. His tone is soft at first, hurt in a way that only Quackity’s closest friends – the ones from the very beginning, could be. “...Do you think revenge is ever really worth it?” The words turn colder, and suddenly Charlie’s fun, playful nature is gone. It makes everyone in the room freeze. No one speaks. No one can look away. There’s a reason why Charlie Slimecicle survived the end of the world.

The thing is that Wolf *trusted* Quackity. He trusted him enough not to question his orders, enough to let himself be manipulated, but never quite enough to pass the test that Quackity gave him: *So what did you think? Does the Blood God live up to his name?*

It’s the kind of mistake that would have cost him his life years ago, but things change. Quackity took him in. The Animal Army took him in. Wolf found a family, and he will give up *everything* for family.

Quackity will too. He raises his head enough to meet Charlie’s eyes, and then he whispers, “No, it isn’t. That’s why we *have* to do this.” There isn’t enough time to argue. There’s never enough time to do anything in this world.

“Well, now that *that’s* outta the way, this is an old amusement park, right?” the Blood God asks.

Wilbur looks like he’s holding his breath. “Uh, yeah. Why?”

“I’m sure you guys have plenty of *dangerous* things lyin’ around.”

The Blood God makes a plan to save Tommy, and it includes fireworks, *lots* of fireworks. Wolf grins, but there’s nothing kind left in it, not for the people who hurt his family. The Preserve – as Technoblade tells them it’s called, is going to *burn*.

Chapter End Notes

I love Purpled so much. He had to grow up fast. He had to learn how to survive, and because of that, he's done things he's not proud of, things which often end up being wrong. He's just trying his best.

A LOT is going to happen in the next (last) chapter, which should be out next Sunday

Please feel free to leave a comment (even just a POG)!! I also really appreciate kudos/bookmarks.

See you guys next week!

sometimes everything we thought we lost, was right there all along.

Chapter Notes

Here's the final chapter!! Hope u guys have had a good week

Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Purpled thinks he's a few hours away from the city. His legs are aching, and he's breathing just a little too hard. He's gone enough days without food or sleep to know why. He's exhausted. But that doesn't matter, none of it does, because he's almost there. He just needs to deliver this letter to a Last Man named Antfrost, and then he'll be good. He'll be okay. At this point, Purpled is willing to do just about anything to survive. He *has* to survive.

It's turning to dusk, the sun streaking long, violet shadows across the sky, when Purpled finds an old-looking house. Maybe he would have stopped once, to watch and think about how pretty the sunset is, but not anymore. It's just a distraction now. A warning. Purpled doesn't particularly *want* to sleep outside, so the house is his only choice. He warily approaches it, ready to run at the slightest of sounds, checking every corner of every room until he's sure it's abandoned.

He ends up settling into one of the rooms upstairs, with carpeting and a bed that smells like dust. There's a window on one wall that'll give him another escape route, and hopefully, enough time to run if someone enters the house. Which wouldn't be the first time he's had to do something like that.

There's only half an hour of day left, if that, and Purpled uses it all up until the very last sliver of light passes through the window. He pulls the map out of his bag and looks it over to make sure he hasn't gotten lost, eats his remaining food (which isn't much, just a spoiled can of beans), and curls up under the bed. Purpled doesn't want to sleep, but his body is screaming at him to just close his eyes, *just close your eyes*. He can feel the carpet softly brush against his bruised skin, and the room falls dark as the steady wind beats against the walls of the house. It's almost peaceful. Purpled shuts his eyes, and that's it. He's out in less than a second, drifting into the only place he ever really feels safe anymore.

He wakes up slowly. At first, Purpled doesn't think about why. It's nothing. He doesn't *hear* anything, and then he does. There's something drifting through the house, something he can't understand, but still recognizes in the back of his head... Purpled opens his eyes with a sharp gasp because *that's a voice*. "...that supposed to mean?" A *voice*. In the house. Where? How close is it?

“I’m just saying, Alex Quackity,” another voice replies, a bit younger and higher. Both men. Adults. Purpled doesn’t even try to figure out what they’re talking about. He just claws at the carpet under him, heart beating so fast now it feels like he’s going to choke.

“I *told* you not to call me that,” the first voice snaps, and then it lowers. Purpled can’t hear the rest, but he *can* hear the two men as their footsteps start to creak up the stairway. It takes only a few seconds for Purpled to close in on his escape and pull on the handle, shifting it up a few inches.

“–Wait...” Purpled freezes. His hand tenses on the edge of the sill. The man heard, *he heard* and there’s no way he isn’t going to hear him again. What does he *do*? Purpled needs to escape. He has a knife on him. No, that’s fucking *stupid*, he should *run*. But he has nowhere to go, where else is he supposed to find– the footsteps grow closer, and closer, and close enough to pass just in front of the door. A single, shallow breath passes, and then the knob slowly begins to turn.

Purpled lunges, fingers knuckle white around the knife in his hand because *they’re going to kill him*. The door opens, but the man standing in it is nothing more than a blur. Purpled grabs at his coat and pulls. He pulls the man forward at the same moment his knife comes down. “*Slime–! Stop!*” The first man yells, but the fear is nothing more than static in Purpled’s ears. His knife stills just an inch before it reaches the man’s throat.

“Don’t – *don’t* move,” Purpled demands with one huge, gasping breath of air.

The second man's throat bobs against the knife. “W-wait, *ow*– ”

Purpled looks into eyes as black as the world outside, and then into the barrel of a gun, into what will be his death. “Fucking let him go, or I’ll blow your head off! *NOW!*” the first man screams, voice trembling. Purpled starts shaking harder at the threat, but he doesn’t listen. The man won’t shoot him long as his friend is being held by a knife.

“Quackity, I’m okay! Don’t– don’t shoot!” The second man Slime interrupts, and as much as talking must hurt, he doesn’t stop. Purpled lets up on his knife a little more, just so the man doesn’t cut his throat. If Slime dies, there’s nothing stopping the first man... Quackity, from... Purpled doesn't know, but he imagines what would happen to him.

Quackity keeps his gun aimed at Purpled’s head, but the snarl on his face falls just a little. Purpled continues to stare at him, unwavering. He’s an adult. Slime too. Neither of them look to have much on them, but their clothes are clean. Quackity is wearing a blue jacket with white stripes, and his black hair sticks messily out of a hat shoved over his head. Slime’s coat is made of animal leather.

“Listen. Let me – go out that window, and I won’t kill your friend,” Purpled bargains. Quackity’s face stills, changing to something indifferent. That just scares Purpled more.

“...What are you doing here?” he asks.

"None of your business."

"Quackity, you're *kind* of pointing a gun at him," Slime interrupts.

"*What?!*" Quackity suddenly exclaims. Purpled can't keep himself from flinching back, never looking away from the gun. "That's only because I thought he was going to kill you! He – he still could you fucking idiot!"

Slime turns his head to look up. "Hey, are you going to kill me? Sorry we barged in like that."

Purpled can't keep his surprise from showing this time. "I– no," he stumbles as he tries to figure out what to say, "I'm not going to–"

"–Great! We aren't going to kill you either. Quackity, could you please lower the gun? We just got scared, is all."

What is *happening*?

Quackity scoffs. "I'm not scared, and *don't* tell me what to do." He lowers the gun anyway and puts it away. Why? *Why*? Purpled hesitates for a moment, to make sure it isn't an act, before he removes his knife. They said they weren't going to hurt him, but that doesn't mean they won't change their minds. He'd be an idiot to trust them so easily.

Slime presses a hand to his neck, carefully backing out of the room until he's standing next to Quackity again. Purpled reaches for the window handle, but he waits to see what they're going to do. Quackity awkwardly clears his throat. "...We'll be in the other room. But you can still leave. Do whatever you want." Quackity does what he says. He turns and disappears down the hallway. Slime shows him a smile that's probably meant to be reassuring, but isn't, and then he follows.

Purpled is left alone.

He doesn't run. He *could*, but he knows an opportunity when he sees one, so he shoves his stuff back under the bed, shoves *himself* under the bed, and waits. There's movement and the muffled sound of voices talking from the other room. Eventually, his heartbeat stills, and the sound of voices gets quieter. That's when Purpled moves. He walks a few steps down the hallway, until he's standing in front of the door. "...and then I'm *finally* gonna do it," Quackity's voice reaches his ears from inside.

"Really?" Slime asks.

"Yeah, you don't think I can?"

"No, I believe you, Alex Quackity. I want that too." What are they talking about?

Quackity sighs. "Where were you born anyway, *Charlie Slimecicle*?" Why doesn't Quackity know that? Aren't they friends?

"Alaska."

"Alaska?! What the *fuck!*"

“Shh! The kid could still be here, trying to sleep.”

“Oh,” Quackity whispers back, “right.”

Purpled feels incredibly awkward all of a sudden. He has no idea where Alaska is supposed to be. Is that still in Colorado? Why is he even listening to this in the first place? He doesn't know them. Why do they care? They're just *strangers*. Purpled sucks in a breath and knocks on the door before he can scare himself into giving up.

"Well, I was—" Charlie starts to say, but then he stops. It falls silent inside, and Purpled can hear a shuffle as someone gets up and walks over to the door. It's Quackity who answers. "Oh, hey," he says when he sees it's him. He looks... unexpectedly happy. "You decided to stay after all. Want some food?" What? Fucking— is he *serious*? Purpled tries to hide his expression, but when something tries to slip through, he lets it. Weak. *Defenseless*. Does Quackity really understand what that's like? Do either of them? They're adults. They have a gun. What do they know? They think he deserves to live because he's a *kid*. That's the only reason.

Purpled always does his best to agree with the things he does before he does them. "Sure," he mumbles, and it's as easy as that. Quackity leads him into the room and collapses back down next to his friend. Purpled is starting to suspect that they *aren't* friends. Quackity's head rests against the wall, and he closes his eyes.

"Hi," Slime greets, but he doesn't wait for a response. He pulls out a bag, and then he pulls out another, littler bag from inside and throws it towards him. Purpled catches it, and he inspects the contents inside. It's... cereal. He takes out a handful and eats it as he watches the two of them carefully. It's obvious they want to ask him something... or maybe they just want him to leave now that they've helped him. Purpled can't. He needs a little more from them than that... just a little.

"...So, you guys wanna trade info?" he asks.

Quackity's eyes shift onto him again, confused. "What?"

"It's pretty simple: I ask you something, you ask me something."

Silence. Silence. What the hell, this is *really* awkward. "Okay! What's your name?" Slime agrees, and Purpled lets out a breath of air he didn't know he was holding.

"...Purpled. And you guys?" He technically knows from hearing them talk to each other, but it's probably a good idea to ask anyway.

"My name's Quackity, and that's—"

"—Charlie Slimecicle! How old are you?"

"Fifteen. How old are you?" He's curious.

"Eighteen and twenty-one," Quackity answers as he points to himself and then at... Slime? Charlie? He thought Quackity's full name was *Alex* Quackity. "So where are you headed,

Purpled?"

"The nearest city. Where are you going?"

"That's wherever Quackity goes. He's got some kind of plan!" A plan?

"Colorado," Quackity clarifies. "We're going to Colorado, because I'm sick of this place. Why are you going to a city? Family?" Something better? Purpled has no idea what Quackity means by that.

"That's two questions," he responds, "but to answer the first: I'm delivering something... Are there no Last Men out here to help you guys?"

"That depends on who's talking to them," Quackity says. It's not really an answer.

"Yeah," Slime agrees.

Purpled doesn't understand. "What? Why *wouldn't* they help you? The Last Men are the reason there's any order at all," he argues back, completely ignoring the rule he just set. The Last Men are the reason for order, the reason everyone is still alive. The General prevents the spread of the virus. The Blood God keep the hybrids away. That's what everyone's always said.

"As long you do *everything* they say," Quackity amends. That's not true. They gave Purpled jobs when no one else would. They gave him a place to stay – a city where people live without shooting each other. They even gave him *this* job, which is why he's still alive at all.

"You're wrong," Purpled says, and his fists clench tighter.

Quackity lets out a hum. "Alright. You can believe whatever the fuck you want, but let me ask you one thing: Do you know what you're delivering?" Quackity's words build, and build, until they hit right where they're meant to.

Purpled tucks his shoulders and grits his teeth. He hates this feeling – the one that reminds him that, as much as he wishes he wasn't, sometimes he really is stupid. Sometimes, he doesn't know anything, because no one ever taught him. "You don't know *anything* about me," he growls, but the voice in his head still doubts: *What is it? What is it? Why doesn't he know? What do the Last Men know that he doesn't?*

"Wait a second," Slime says, and his voice makes Purpled turn his head. It's the first time he's spoken during the conversation.

"Why?"

"You should hear his plan." The plan. What plan? Purpled stands there, debating whether these two are worth the effort anymore. What do they know? They think the Last Men are *bad*. He should just leave while he can... still, there's something inside of him that's curious – like fingers that dance over an open flame, like the trigger of a gun before an animal. He turns back around and meets Quackity's eyes. In that very moment, the decision he makes changes his entire future. "...What is it?"

"Listen to me. You can take that package and disappear," Quackity states, "and that's it for you. I know how good that sounds right now. But you have another choice: Join me."

"*What?* What could you *possibly* give me that the Last Men can't?"

"You could become so much *more* than what you are right now. You have so much *potential*. Why waste it away in the wilderness doing whatever the Last Men tell you? Don't you want to stop feeling so *helpless*? Don't you want power? I guarantee the Last Men can't give you that. One day, they're going to tell you to do something that you don't want to, but you'll do it anyway. You'll tell yourself that it means nothing, but it will. I'm going to build my own city, with my own rules. It sounds crazy right now. I know it does, but if you join me," Quackity says, "you won't be *used* ever again."

Purpled opens the letter the next morning.

He often thinks about what would've happened to him if he hadn't. He would've become the General's – a Last Man, once he turned eighteen. He would have even reunited with his brother, but it would have been through misery and pain. Purpled would have already been twisted into nothing more than a weapon. A hybrid killer.



Wolf's skin stings against the gravel, and his eyes water from the smoke. Gunfire. Blood. Victory. *Death*. He doesn't regret it. The Preserve is burning, smoke rising high enough for the entire world to see. It's over: Tommy is safe. The General is down. Wilbur is wounded. All that leaves left is Technoblade, the Blood God, who holds their lives in the palm of his hand and the edge of his sword and chooses *peace*. It was only through the cover of dusk, one carefully crafted plan, and the blood of a dozen men that the Animal Army stay alive.

He watches Tommy hug the Blood God, thinking... *knowing* what it takes to be able to forgive like that, and then there's a Last Man stumbling across the battlefield. His footsteps land hard with pain, with a dazed confusion in his eyes, as he searches the street. He spots Tommy, and his grip tightens on his gun. But unlike in his eyes, there's no confusion, no hesitation. It becomes very clear, very quick when Tommy hides that they know each other. Those eyes are on Tommy, threatening, burning through the air, and then they're not. The Man freezes up like he's seen something he wasn't supposed to. "P... Purpled?" he says, slow and fragile. Wait... That *voice*. It's a promise. It means protection, and love, and *grief*. Wolf is never going to forget that voice. Why? Why does it sound like...?

"...Punz?" The Last Man's eyes widen. He knows. He *knows*. Wolf feels like he's dreaming. He feels like he never even went to sleep, because— because his brother is *right there*. Punz is alive. He's here. He's *alive*.

Wolf wants to hear his voice again, forever, and then a sound rumbles throughout the entire city enough to shake his teeth. Tanks – Pre-crumble machines of war, roar onto the street,

because the Last Men controlling them still think the battle is going. They still think they haven't lost – that their leader isn't fallen to the ground in defeat. The General tilts his head towards the tanks, but he doesn't get up. He doesn't order their deaths, and so the Last Men remain still.

Punz remains still too.

The reason strikes down Wolf's spine and settles into his heart. Punz is *alive* , and he's at the Preserve. He's wearing the faded, dark clothes of a Last Man. He's a Last Man. He's holding a rifle. He's a *Last Man* .

Wolf suddenly imagines hearing that voice again, and it being *nothing* like the one he remembers. He imagines the sound of his brother's voice, not kind, not comforting, but ordering his death. He can't stop himself before the thought runs through his mind. *Is Punz even my brother anymore?* , he wonders, and it's suddenly like he's forgotten how to breathe. No, *no*, this isn't fucking *happening*. He can't breathe. He *can't*- he's *suffocating*.

There's a tug on his arm, and the world returns with a gasp of air. The Animal Army is retreating. "Wolf, we have to go!" Quackity orders, but there's a desperation behind it, like he thinks Wolf isn't going to listen.

Wolf doesn't need to choose. He made his decision a long time ago.

He tears eyes away from his brother, and he runs.

His friends – his *family*, obviously have a lot of questions, so many questions: "Are you okay?" and "Who was that?" and "What happened?" and "Wolf?" and "Leave him." and "We have more important things to worry about." and "Tommy?" and "Are they chasing us?" and...

He doesn't want to think about it. He doesn't want to come up with the answers. It's just like that day, because it feels like whatever– whatever just *happened* , it didn't happen to him. It happened to someone else.

Wolf shuts it all out.

Wilbur is helped down off one of the horses, face twisted, limbs shaking, but never once looking away from Tommy. "Tommy?" he gasps in fear when the boy stumbles, breaths short as he collapses in on himself.

Technoblade catches him before he can hit the ground, kneeling down, speaking in a low, calm tone. "Hey, kid. You're okay. Can I help you? Patch you up like last time?" Tommy's eyes are glazed over, but there's relief in them. He reaches a bruised hand up to hold onto the fur of the man's cloak. It's as much of an answer as he needs to give.

"Tommy is safe," Tubbo says as his hand presses down again on Wilbur's wound. "But we have to stop you from bleeding out anymore, bossman."

Wilbur opens his mouth to say something more, but all that passes from him is a pained groan. He's in no condition to give orders, so Quackity does. "...Shit. Alright, listen up everyone! We need to secure the camp! As long as we're in Last Men territory, we could be attacked at any moment! Now *go!*"

"Yes, Duck!" The Animal Army responds, and they get to work: tying up the horses, setting up the tents, making a fire, cooking food... Wolf takes one of the guns and walks through the trees. He settles down at one end of the camp, listening to the wind and the grass blow. Nothing changes. Nothing is chasing them, or he doubts they ever would have made it out of the Preserve at all.

Wolf doesn't know how long he sits there as the sun starts to crawl down the sky. His eyes slip shut a few times, before he jerks his head to stop himself from sleeping. Eventually, he figures he should go back, so he pushes himself up and walks through the trees. He can immediately tell that things are a lot calmer now, quieter. Some of the members greet him as he passes, but most everyone who isn't on guard duty, which appears to be night shift, is asleep.

Tommy is predictably passed out, but he's since been moved to one of the sleeping bags. Technoblade is still sitting by him. There's bandages strewn across the ground as he cleans and wraps up the boy's wounds. Wolf nods to him as he passes. He catches hushed voices, before he sees who's making them. The remaining members are sitting by the fire, waiting for the moment they can finally sleep.

Wolf's approach is quiet, but they still notice when he sits down by the fire. "There's some, um, soup, if you want it," Ranboo tells him. Wolf nods. It doesn't take long for his stomach to rumble, as if it also heard Ranboo. He walks over to the pot, takes a bowl, and sits back down. Just as he raises the spoon to his lips, there's footsteps that make him stop.

"Wolf," Quackity says, and the name— *his* name, sounds strange. It sounds different. "You probably saw, but day shift is taking first watch. Your side of the camp is covered. Eat. Get some sleep..." and then there's hesitation "...let me know if you need anything." It's more nervous than it would have been in the past, because of— of everything that's happened in the past few days. In the past few *hours*. That's not just it though. There's something else attached to the statement, some kind of offer. Wolf knows, yet again, what Quackity really wants to say: '*Are you okay?*,' or maybe '*Do you want to talk?*' Quackity doesn't ask though. He's too scared. The members listening in, pretending otherwise, they're scared too.

Wolf doesn't know if they're scared for *him*, or for *themselves*; for what will happen if they push just a little too far, or what will happen when they learn something about him they didn't want to know. "Thanks, but I'm fine," he tells Quackity, as he finally brings a spoonful of the soup up to his mouth. He's not. He doesn't think he's been fine since he was that four year old — a boy at the end of the world.

He eats, and finds one of the empty tents, and doesn't sleep. Every time he closes his eyes, he sees his brother's face staring back at him. After all these years, he can finally remember it again.

It doesn't take long, only two days, for Wolf to hear the sounds of laughter. He tells them everything, all the things that he never could before.



Purpled scoffs. "There's no way that's true," he argues as he kicks his feet back, letting the warmth of the fire sink into his skin. It makes him tired. He can't help but close his eyes, and even though can't see Quackity's face, he knows what he'd find. Doubt.

"No, really! I've wanted to work with wildlife ever since I was an infant."

"And a Polar Bear just *walks* up to you?"

Purpled opens his eyes in time to see Slime sit up. "Pretty much! I was just sitting there watching the sunset, and when I looked to my left. Bam! There he was, just hanging around!"

"I should've known you lived in Alaska. You're crazy," Quackity says, but his tone carries no judgement in it. In fact, it sounds almost *proud*. Purpled nods along. Slime isn't like anyone he's ever met. There's something different about him. A week ago he would have said there was something *off*, but now he doesn't know. He doesn't understand Slime. He doesn't think he ever will, but he wants to. "...I wanted to be a lawyer," Quackity admits.

Purpled thinks about it, even though he already knows. "Ninja Turtle." It's not a real job, just one that a little kid with a big imagination had. Purpled wonders what he would've been, if he was ever allowed to grow up like that.

Quackity stares at him, expression wide. "...I have no idea what that is, but it sounds *awesome!*" Slime yells with a big grin, and then he extends his hand. "Dap me up!" Purpled does, and he can't wipe the smile off his face, even after his chest starts hurting. It feels right. When was the last time he laughed like this? Laughed at all?

He remembers Quackity's, ' *I've only known him for a few days, but I trust him. I trust him with my life,* ' and Slime's, ' *I thought he was a funny guy, so I started following him and didn't stop. I don't think I want to now.* '

Purpled wonders, for the first time in his life, if people were *meant* to find each other.

Fundy catches them trekking up through Colorado about two months later. He's a thin, red-headed boy with a cunningness in his eyes. " *I got separated from my group about a week ago. Have you seen them?* " he frantically asks. At the time, they didn't see anybody, and they

never do find that group of people. Fundy doesn't say, but Wolf wonders whether they even existed to begin with.

Purpled's gun flies from his hands, and the unexpected threat of it makes him flinch back. "*Don't*," Charlie orders, but he doesn't hear it. He doesn't hear anything but the low, threatening growl that echoes from the darkness. His heart slams in his chest. The leaves rustle and the trees snarl and *something* is touching him. Purpled lashes out, but whatever it is only holds on tighter. It's that *thing*, it's the—

"—Woah! Hey, it's okay," someone says. Purpled tugs on the thing one more time before his mind wanders back. Quackity is holding his arm. "It was a hybrid," he explains, as if Purpled is *stupid*.

"I *know*. I know that," he gasps as he meets Quackity's calm gaze. He knows what it was. He doesn't know why they didn't let him kill it.

"...It's okay guys. I think it's gone now," Fundy tells them.

Purpled sucks in a shuddering, gasping breath, but he still watches the darkness. There's nothing. Nothing. It really is gone. The thought twists in his heart like fear, and then relief, and then it settles to a sharp, dangerous anger. "Why did you stop me?!"

Charlie frowns. He walks over to where the gun had clattered against the ground, picking it up gently and offering it out to Purpled. Purpled takes it, slowly, but he's confused. He's so *confused*. "Waste of bullets," Charlie says, "and a waste of a life."

Foolish finds them next, in the remnants of some old, forgotten city, lost to the Colorado wilderness. He hides from a group of men for a reason he won't say, and when they save him, tells them: "*I'm no one*" with anonymity on his tongue. Quackity gives him a chance, and the seeds grow as surely as the packet stolen in Foolish's pocket will someday. After years of running, Foolish becomes someone.

Dark exist behind Purpled's eyelids, and stars exist in the sky. Some nights, he likes to watch only one, and others he likes to watch both. His eyes stay open tonight, staring up at the metal roof of the shed that just saved their lives. The storm rages outside, bone-shivering and deadly, like most things in this world are. Purpled pulls himself closer to his friends, because

at some point that's what he started calling them. They're huddled on the floor, freezing together while Fundy tries to start a lighter.

He can see the tiny sparks burn out before they can even exist. "Come *on!*" Fundy hisses, and then he flicks his finger one more time, and it works. It ignites. They fuel the fire with a few damp pieces of wood that litter the dirt floor.

"This sucks," Fundy finally says, and if that isn't an *understatement*.

"You *think*?" Purpled feels like he's never going to stop shivering.

Foolish lets out a strangled laugh. "Wish I could stop th-thinking about how cold I am. It just makes it *worse*."

"What about a story? That might help distract us!" How is Charlie able to talk? He doesn't even look *cold*- oh, wait, *Alaska*. Purpled doesn't understand why anyone would willingly live there- *shit*. An arm press against his side, shaking from the cold. He forces down the instinct to push it away.

"Why- why not?" Quackity says, to which Purpled continues with, "...only if you go first."

Charlie nods, and his hands casts shadows against the wall. "How about the time I was six and convinced everyone at school that I was a sentient piece of gloop?"

" *What?* " Fundy.

"Oh god. I regret asking." Quackity.

Purpled laughs sharply and says, "What do you mean? This sounds *amazing*."

"...Gloop?" Foolish repeats.

"Yeah! A guy made of slime, without meat and bones... They were scared of me."

"How did you even get them to *believe* you?" Quackity asks.

"I could bend all my fingers backwards!" Purpled doesn't get it. "I'd show you, but it's too dark right now."

"Oh my god," Fundy gasps. "What did your teacher think?"

"She had to explain that gloops weren't real, and that the only race was the 'human race.'" Well, that was true once, back before the hybrids were born. "And then my parents found out, but they just thought it was funny."

"...Siblings?" Foolish tests, but there's enough hesitancy in his voice to make it clear that Charlie doesn't have to answer.

"Nope, only me."

"But you were here during the Great Crumble," Purpled realizes, and he can't hold the words back.

"Sure was. I have family," Charlie admits. Suddenly, Purpled wishes someone would tell another funny story. The last thing he wants to hear about is *family*. Sometimes, the Great Crumble was like a gun. When people talked about it, the gun was either loaded, or it wasn't. Purpled's was always loaded, always aimed at his head. "What about you, Purpled? We were all kids when it happened, but you were *really* young."

"Yeah," he agrees with a breath of air. "And no, I don't." –*have any family*. Purpled doesn't know when he started thinking it, but at some point, he did. He thought for the first time: *My brother is dead*, and he believed it. It's been *eleven* years. He gave up hope a long time ago, not during some big moment he can remember, but during many, many small ones. "But I have... friends," he says, thinking the word over. It's the first time he says it outloud, in a cold, dark shed, miles into the wilderness as they search for home.

He feels a part of his heart mend that night, listening to them talk: Quackity. Charlie. Fundy. Foolish.

Purpled gave up.

He doesn't think they have.

Where there isn't Last Men, there's mad men. Where there isn't mad men, there's purple flowers. He's seen them before in the mud and stone and corpses. This time is no different. It's a building with a tower and a little weathervane. They never go inside. They run as far as they can from those little flowers, and for the first time in Purpled's life, he asks himself: Why do the flowers keep growing if we're already saved?

They're tall, winding things. Buildings that spiral into the sky. The rain is drizzly today, and the shadows cast long against the backdrop of the distant city. At first, Purpled doesn't understand where they are, because he's never seen one before. "What *is* this place?" he whispers.

"Haunted, probably," Fundy says. Dusk turns the sky red, and the pattern of their steps echo as they wander further through the streets.

"And *old*," Charlie adds, kicking a stray rock across the concrete. There's a pistol in his hand – the same one that was pointed at Purpled nearly a year ago. Time passes slow. Promises, even slower.

“It’s an amusement park,” Quackity explains. An amusement park? Purpled tries to remember if he’s ever heard of one. He doesn’t think so.

Fundy chuckles, but it draws higher at the end in the way it always does when he’s uncomfortable. “My mom took me to an amusement park once. But this place is just creepy, man.”

“Damn. They had a ton of them on the East coast,” Foolish says. “I won one of those giant inflatable hammers one time and...” and he stops for a moment, “...pretended to hit my sister with it.”

“I think it’s normal to want to kill your sibling, but only when they were *really* annoying, right?” Charlie asks. What? Purpled looks at him like he’s crazy.

“Me and my brothers tried to bury each other alive at the beach every other weekend,” Quackity says like that’s *normal*.

“ *What?* ” Purpled whispers, unable to keep the distress out of his voice.

“Oh, metaphorically, of course!” Charlie adds, but that just confuses him more. How can you kill someone *metaphorically*? That’s stupid as hell.

Quackity lets out a cackle, slapping a hand over his mouth. “It wasn’t serious,” he explains, turning honest, “not like how people are now, killing each other for every kind of shitty thing you can imagine.” Purpled nods, because maybe that makes sense. Every time he wakes up, he forgets a little more of what things used to be like.

Quackity suddenly he walks off to the left a few steps, stopping a few feet in front of something... tall and rectangular, seemingly held to the ground by two wooden poles. He brushes his hand across the surface of the structure, and the dust fades away to reveal a single word: WARNING.

WARNING.

WARNING.

THIS IS OFFICIALLY YOUR FINAL WARNING.

Purpled doesn’t know what kind of noise he makes, stumbling back in fear before someone puts an arm on his back. “Purpled, hey. It’s okay. It’s just a sign,” Foolish says gently. Purpled’s panic lessens, but his hands won’t stop shaking. He’s— he’s *not* scared. He’s *not*.

“Please read the safety... sign and follow all... directions... of the Employees at all times,” Quackity reads slowly as he brushes away the dust. “It’s a bunch of rules.”

"So much for *those*, " Purpled manages to say.

Quackity lets out a tsk as he removes his hand from the sign. "Yeah, let's get moving. We need to find some shelter."

There's an old ride. A place where they can stay safe from the rain. Purpled lies with his back against the wall and goes to sleep, for once, without having to fight for it. He wakes to something burning a few feet from his head, something *on fire*. He's only seen one a few times before, used by hunters out in the woods. An *arrow*. Purpled scrambles to his feet. He hears voices. "*Shit!*" Quackity screams nearby, and Purpled realizes they weren't alone in this place. *They never were*.

Purpled can barely see through the dark, but he can just make out someone moving to his left. It's a person struggling on the ground. It's *Quackity*. He reaches for his knife to help, to do *something*, when suddenly there's a hand on him. It throws him forward, and he feels pain. Purpled can't even get up off the ground, before the cold point of a blade rests against his throat. He stills. "Don't move," the voice whispers into his ear, and they— *he*, sounds young. He sounds *more* than willing to kill Purpled.

"Quackity! Where are you?!" Charlie shouts, voice ringing with fear. A gun fires off. Foolish screams.

"You—! I'll kill—!" Fundy tries to say, but his voice cuts off with a breath of air. It's the last thing Purpled hears before it falls silent, and he wonders if this is it. He can feel something like hot rage and cold fog build in him. They're dead, his friends are *dead*, they *have* to be—

"—You *never* should have set foot into this place if you wanted to live," a voice speaks, and the figure of the man reveals itself. A Last Man? No, there's at least four, maybe five or six attackers, all holding weapons against his friends, all of them wearing weird clothes. The man who spoke has a brown, feathered outfit on, and he's holding a sword to Quackity's throat. His eyes glint cold through the dark.

Everyone is still alive, still *breathing*. There's an arrow sticking out of Charlie's shoulder. Fundy is on the ground. He doesn't know how, but it's clear from his twisted expression that he's hurt too. Foolish is last, holding back a snarl at the woman pointing a gun to his face. "Fucking Last Men! I'll *kill* you!" Quackity spits.

"Last Men?" the man spits back. "We aren't *Last Men*."

"We aren't either! Look at us!" Foolish demands, but Purpled can see the way the feathered man's arm tenses, ready to use his weapon. He knows the movement as well as he knows himself.

It's over.

"—Owl, wait," the voice against Purpled's ear argues even as the knife stays on his throat. "The Last Men don't let kids join. At least, I don't think they do." Owl stills. He looks up, confused until his eyes fall on Purpled, who just barely turned sixteen a month ago.

"...Let them go. They aren't Last Men," Owl orders, shoving himself off Quackity. Quackity is covered in mud. His face bleeding. His arms are scratched to high hell. Purpled knows the look in his eyes. It's volatile. Quackity kicks his leg out.

“– *Fuck*, ” Owl yells as he buckles and falls into the mud again.

Quackity isn’t going to let this one go.

Owl looks like he wants to kill them again, but especially Quackity now. He doesn’t. His order stays, and whoever is holding the knife against Purpled’s throats lets out a breath, probably in relief, before he lets him go. Purpled backs away a few feet, and that’s when he looks at him. He looks at the kid who saved his life, who saved *all* their lives, and it’s a *hybrid*.

Quackity would have fulfilled his promise that day. He would have made that amusement park into an empire, into *Las Nevadas*. But that’s not what happened. It’s the day they met the Animal Army. The kid’s name is Tubbo. He’s thirteen. “What? Never met a hybrid before?” he asks, and Purpled keeps his head down and his eyes away. It’s the day they meet Wilbur, Phil, Jack, Niki, Tubbo, and Ranboo. Purpled doesn’t know what to think anymore, or what hybrids really are, or even who he is, but he does know this: the Last Man were wrong.

“Tonight,” Wilbur begins, “we have *five* new members joining the Animal Army.” The current members grouped up in the hallway together erupt into cheers. Wilbur eventually has to hold a hand up to get them to quiet, and then he continues. “Our pledge is simple: It doesn’t matter who we are. It doesn’t matter where we came from. We will always protect hybrids, no matter the cost. Do you understand?” There’s something that settles into the air. It’s dangerous. It’s the kind of intensity that drives the hearts and minds of the Animal Army.

Wilbur watches them nod, and then he grins. “...Alright,” he says, and there’s something like pride and even more respect in his voice. “Whenever you’re ready, dip your hands into your buckets, announce your animal, and draw.”

Purpled dips his hands into the bucket, and they come out purple. Quackity’s are blue. Charlie’s green. Foolish’s yellow. Fundy’s orange. “Quackity?” Wilbur asks first.

“You know, I’ve thought about it for a while now, and I think I’m going to go with a duck.”

“Slime?”

“A giraffe!”

“Foolish?”

“I always wanted to be a marine biologist, so I’m picking a shark.”

“Fundy?”

“Foxes are cool.”

“Purpled?” He looks around the room, at the faces of his future, and then down at hands, and then back up at Wilbur.

“Wolf,” he says like it’s the simplest thing in the world, and maybe it is. Purpled raises his hand up to the wall. He thinks of the three year old, too scared to live but too scared to die, and the way his older brother’s hand held in his own, and gunfire and smoke and death and *nothing*. Wolf joins the Animal Army that day, and they become something he never thought he would want again: family.

Wolf forgets about the past. He lets it go.

Eret is half-dead when they find him. Foolish sees him lying in the snow, another city over, cold as death. “Do you know who I am?” he asks when he wakes up. His skin is untouched, and he doesn’t ask for food. “It isn’t amnesia,” Foolish tells them, and eventually, after Eret joins the Animal Army, he says: “It’s because I was trapped. Crazy people always need something to believe in. That thing just happened to be me.”

Sometimes, though, sometimes the past won’t let go.



Wolf stares up at the walls of the Preserve. There’s still burn marks scorched into the wood from the last time he was here, but within the past few months, the Last Men have worked hard to rebuild what they lost. A Cure isn’t an easy thing to solve, but then again, neither is hatred.

That’s not why he’s here.

He’s still going to find out.

At first, Wolf isn’t noticed. His steps are silent, and he blends in well enough with the waning sun as he continues to approach the Preserve. He hasn’t drawn his gun either, because that’d be stupid. The two Men on the wall are well-armed. Wolf actually recognizes the first one. He’s staring off into the distance, eyes unfocused, completely lost in thought. The second Man is actually looking in the *right* direction, but he still doesn’t see him.

"George," Wolf says, revealing himself. George's eyes slowly fall down onto him, but he doesn't react nearly as much as Wolf thought he would. He barely even reacts at all.

"Oh..." George replies back, the word lazily drawn out. He glances at the other Man, who just stumbles to his feet. This is... honestly what Wolf wanted, but the fact that they aren't attacking makes him nervous. There's something different about them now. George is wearing civilian clothes: a coat, jeans, and a pair of shades with thick, white bands and black lenses. The Man looks similar, with his puffy jacket and red winter hat. "...What do you want?" George asks, and although the question isn't cold, it isn't friendly either.

"You know."

George looks away again, hand reaching up to pull his shades up above his eyes, before he says, "...I'll go get Sapnap."

That makes Wolf pause. He was expecting the General. "Why?"

"*Because,*" George says, words alive and unforgiving, "he's our leader now." Wolf realizes what this bitter thing that stays in the air is, as George turns away. It's sadness.

"Just hold on like a minute or two, so we can open the gate," the other... *man* who is left says, looking a lot more scared now, before he also disappears.

Wolf brushes his shaking fingers across his palms. He's just nervous, *just* nervous.

The gate starts to open, creaking like it's in agony, until it eventually gives him a view into the inside of the Preserve. He didn't *plan* to do this, but he didn't pull a Tommy either. He told the others where he was going and why. Hell, Techno even offered to come with him, but he said no. This is something he needs to do alone.

Wolf walks through the gate. "Hey," the man who was standing on the wall with George greets, "sorry for the wait. Sapnap should be here soon." Wolf nods, and he glances around for a moment. There's people walking around. A *lot* people. Some look like they could still be Last Men, but most don't. They're carrying crates of supplies, or bags, or even weapons. Civilians with guns. Placed along the sides of the street are stands full of vendors. Wolf even sees a few children playing in the yard of one of the houses, still partially destroyed. He might have even been the one to burn it off.

Further in the city's distance, there's another building. The lab.

He thinks of Tommy.

"Oh, there he is," the man still standing next to him says, and he's right. Sapnap is approaching from the direction of the street. George isn't with him. He must not have wanted to talk anymore, but Sapnap clearly does. His pace is quick as he weaves through the crowd of people. He keeps his eyes off of anyone, but he meets Wolf's with a nod. Sapnap looks different too. Instead of a headband, he's wearing a baseball cap with a TX on the front, and, surprisingly, doesn't seem to be armed at all. Wolf can't help but notice how outnumbered he

is, looking back down at all the people in the street. How outnumbered *all* the Last Men are. "Thank you, Bad," Sapnap says, stopping a few feet away.

The scientist. Bad. The one who tortured Tommy. The one who Tommy gave a Cure.

"Of course," Bad says. He looks at them for a moment, before he turns back towards the gate and starts walking. He makes it a maybe few steps before he freezes in place. "...Could you—" he starts to say, words careful, "—could you tell Tommy something?"

Wolf stares at the man's turned back. "What is it?"

"I did it."

Tommy could care less if he ever sees or hears from Bad again, but this is about more than that. This is about the entire world. Wolf thinks Tommy would want to know about that. They all would. "I will," he tells Bad.

Bad nods. He keeps walking.

Wolf watches his boots press into the mud.

He watches him stop at the side of another man, and he knows who it is.

"...So, Purpled, I heard you're looking for your brother."

Wolf meets Sapnap's eyes again. "Sapnap. I heard you're in charge now."

Sapnap looks away, letting out a short, unenthused chuckle. "Sort of. I'll explain what the fuck happened on the way to Punz'." Punz'... Sapnap starts walking, and Wolf silently follows him towards a path off to the left. The crowded street would be too loud for them to hear each other. "The Last Men kind of fell apart," Sapnap begins, glancing back with an odd look in his eyes. "I mean you heard the Blood God that day. He banished *himself*. I guess you could say he really was like our god, and our god had left us."

Sapnap lets out a sigh. "And Dream was our leader, but he lied. He didn't tell me about the experiments, and neither did Bad." It's not 'us' anymore. It's 'me.' "Sometimes, I wonder if I would have even cared... Your brother didn't, and he knew..." Wolf grits his teeth. He hates the reminder as much as he appreciates it. It's the truth. It still makes him sick all over. "...Anyway, Dream didn't say it, but I knew he was angry. A lot of the other Last Men were too. They couldn't accept that we had lost our god *and* our leader in the same day. They just kept believing."

"But you didn't," Wolf says.

"No. But I'm saying some of us *did*, and they blamed everything on that kid. On Tommy."

"Is that why we were attacked a couple months ago?" It was nearly dusk when Tubbo woke them up, panicked about "humans in the wind." They burned out all the torches in the park, grabbed their guns, and stood their ground. The Last Men fled, screaming into the darkness about their fallen General and his army. After that, they never came back.

Sapnap slowly nods. "It was a fucking mess. Dream claimed he didn't know anything about their plans, and while George thought he was telling the truth, I didn't. He had lied before, so we locked him up in one of the houses just in case. It was...a difficult thing to do. Especially for us."

"What about the other Last Men?" *What about my brother?*, Wolf wants to ask more than anything, but he doesn't.

"A few returned. That was actually the same week Tommy brought us a Cure. I thought I was fucking dreaming, until Bad said it was the real thing. You heard what he said just now. That kid *saved* us, even after... after *everything*," Sapnap ends lamely. Kid. Not hybrid.

"So what happened to Dream?" *And my brother? What the fuck happened to him?*

"When I told Dream about the Cure, a part of him had already given up, but I think that was the moment when he truly didn't *want* to be the General anymore. He just wanted to be Dream again." Sapnap pauses. "...I can't pretend I know the first thing about forgiveness, but he's trying. *I'm* trying. Tommy brought us a Cure, and we gave it to the world. We swore to never harm another hybrid again."

"I believe you," Wolf says. "But that's not why I'm here." He's still not here for an explanation. Tommy doesn't need anything more from the Last Men. The Last Men... the Last Men are gone now.

"Of course. I think part of the reason Dream gave up was because Punz did too. He wasn't the same, ever since he saw you."

Wolf's heart shoots into his throat. "What?"

"He told us that his little brother was alive. That nothing else mattered to him."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really," Sapnap echoes back. He keeps walking for a while longer, passing by a few houses, until he finally slows them down outside the back of one. "This is Punz'," Sapnap explains, and then he clears his throat. "Hey, Purpled?"

Purpled's hands still shake, but he lets himself answer this time, because it's his name. It's *his* name. "Yeah?"

"Thank you," Sapnap says, and such simple things can mean so much sometimes, can't they?

Sapnap adjusts his baseball cap, and then he nods once more before turning and walking back down the way they came. Wolf watches him leave, his figure darkening with the midday shadows, until he disappears entirely. Wolf can tell, even without words or any kind of explanation, that Sapnap isn't the same. He's no longer a Man, and never will he be one again.

Which makes him think... Who else is here, in this city, with a voice and face that he would recognize? He still remembers Karl and Callahan – the Men who saved his life and then tried to send him to his death. Are they here?

Wolf thinks they might be.

But that's not why he's here.

Wolf shudders out a breath, and then he looks towards the house. It's small. It reminds him of the apartment where Punz and him used to live together. He thinks of Ninja Turtle figurines... Xbox games... the feeling of being protected and safe. The things he thought he would have forever. Wolf's steps are silent as he walks along the stony path that leads up to the house. All he has left now are dreams that ache of grief and pain.

There's a few empty flower pots placed against the porch railing and a broom leaned against the wall. Wolf walks up the steps, finally stopping in front of the door and raising a hand to softly knock. He doesn't look away. He *can't*, even when the sound of footsteps from inside makes him want to scream.

Punz isn't here, and then he is, opening the door with a blank expression. He's wearing sweatpants and a faded, Pre-crumble band shirt. His hair is shorter than before, but his eyes—his eyes are still the same. Purpled is twenty now. Punz thirty-four. "...Purp?" he whispers softly, and as he steps through the door, his eyes widen. He looks *afraid*.

Purpled trembles. There's something more scary to him than facing down the barrel of a gun, more awful than starvation. He hears his name – the one only Punz called— *calls* him. He feels his fingers touch the air. When he was only three. When he was nearly twenty. Purpled is scared. He's *scared*, and he doesn't know what to say or do. His— his *brother* is here, walking towards him and suddenly there's a pair of arms around his back. It's... Punz' arms. It's a hug. Punz is *hugging* him.

"I'm here," Punz whispers, and this is his brother. Purpled wants answers. Whatever Punz has done, and wherever he's been, and whether or not the reasons for them were his little brother or not... right now it doesn't matter. This isn't some Last Man, or a stranger. It's his *brother*.

Purpled breaks. He falls into the hug, wrapping his arms as tightly as he can around Punz, burying his head into his shoulder. Purpled is four again, lost and alone and unable to stop the sobs that tear out of his throat. He breaks. He grieves for all the things he has and all the things he never could.

He finally reaches for Punz again, and when their hands connect, neither of them let go.

Chapter End Notes

Punz and Purpled are finally reunited!! They are different. They are older. But there's a part of them that will always be the same. They will always be brothers.

Mercbros make me cry. I had to wait 4 months for them to meet again.

oh god figuring out everyone's ages is like the hardest thing literally ever

Please feel free to leave a comment (even just a POG)! I really appreciate kudos and bookmarks too!!

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